



IMPACT REPORT 2024 - 2025



ENERGY & WATER

250+

TREES PLANTED

Green panelist
speakers:

10



220+

Tree planting
volunteers

8.57%

WATER

5.46%

ENERGY

% increase in usage from baseline to competition

ENERGY & WATER

SLO the FLOW

SLO the FLOW is an annual Energy and Water Conservation Challenge that aims to educate and inspire first-year students to conserve natural resources while living in on-campus housing. Throughout the challenge, students are encouraged to reduce water and energy use within their living communities, promoting long-term sustainable habits from the start of their college experience.

This year, the challenge took place from February 3-February 28, with 3 weeks of baseline data collected beforehand to ensure that competition data could be compared to a baseline number. Unfortunately, unlike past years, this year's competition did not yield definitive results due to insufficient marketing and difficulties in communicating with first-year students directly. Despite these challenges, we were able to collaborate with Cal Poly Humboldt's Green Campus and Facilities Management teams to create an energy and water competition that spread over both Cal Poly Universities, with hopes to spread to Cal Poly Pomona in the future.

In partnership with the Inter-Housing Council (IHC), we were also able to end the challenge by providing the winning living community, Sierra Madre, with free tacos. The relationships built this year will hopefully lead to greater participation in future SLO the FLOW challenges and create opportunities to promote sustainable living across multiple Cal Poly Universities through healthy competition.



Cheda Ranch Tree Planting

In a first of its kind initiative during Spring 2025, Cal Poly executed a large-scale tree planting project at Cheda Ranch just north of Cal Poly's main campus. Across 3 days in February and March, over 200 students and community volunteers planted 250+ trees, predominantly native Coast Live Oaks (*Quercus agrifolia*).

This project was motivated by long-term campus goals of carbon sequestration, shade creation for grazing animals, improved aesthetics in front of the Gold Tree Solar Farm, and enhanced ecosystem services on Cal Poly agricultural lands. Grazing animals were suffering from a lack of shade, resulting in increased rates of skin cancer, necessitating a shade solution. This presented a perfect opportunity for collaboration to increase carbon sequestration and improve animal welfare through tree planting.

In addition to positive environmental benefits and campus community engagement, the Cheda Ranch Tree Planting Project showcased a unique collaboration between multiple campus groups including Facilities Management and Development, the College of Agriculture, Food, and Environmental Sciences (CAFES), the Cal Poly Plant Conservatory, Biological Sciences Department faculty, and the Green Campus Team. Together, these partners helped plan, execute, and maintain a tree planting project that will continue to benefit the community and local environment for decades to come.



Green Careers Panel

As part of Cal Poly's Earth Week programming, the Green Careers Panel was organized to connect students with professionals across a range of environmental and sustainability-related fields. The event aimed to provide students with valuable career insights, practical advice, and networking opportunities.

This year's panel featured five professionals representing various sectors of the environmental industry: an Environmental Scientist, a Water Systems Engineer, a Climate Empowerment Program Facilitator, a Restoration Specialist, and San Luis Obispo's Natural Resources Manager. Throughout the event, attendees gained insight into entering the job market as a recent graduate and the dynamics of working in both public and private sectors of environmental work. Over thirty students attended the panel which included a moderated Q&A session, and the opportunity for students to network with panelists before and after the discussion.

Green Living Guide

The Green Living Guide was originally created in 2018 by five honors students with the goal of educating and influencing Cal Poly students to live sustainably while on campus, and throughout their everyday life. Now, Cal Poly's Green Campus team is in the final stages of creating a new document to provide more relevant and up-to-date information.

Over the past year, the team compiled information regarding six different themes: community, energy, food, reuse, transportation, and water. Each section outlines what Cal Poly and Green campus are doing to enhance sustainability measures, as well as how students can actively participate in Green Living initiatives. For example, the guide highlights on-campus sustainability clubs and simple actions students can take to get involved with both campus-wide and locally held community events. The updated Green Living Guide is scheduled to be published on the [Sustainability Website](#) next school year.



193

GRAD GOWNS

GIVEN



60

Water bottles
recovered



10

Zero Waste
Ambassador
volunteers

153

Grad gowns
donated

ZWA & REUSE

Zero Waste Ambassadors

The Zero Waste Ambassadors (ZWA) supported compost education and waste diversion efforts at key campus locations throughout the 2024–2025 academic year. At Vista Grande, Cal Poly's primary dining facility for freshmen, ZWA volunteers tabled and assisted at the waste station three times across the year. By helping students correctly sort their waste, ZWAs helped reduce food waste sent to the landfill while encouraging students to learn what items belong in each waste stream. During one spring quarter event, ZWA volunteers hosted an interactive tabling activity—including a whiteboard sorting game—to engage students in compost and recycling education. In just two hours, volunteers diverted three full bins of compostable waste from the landfill. ZWA volunteers also supported campus-wide waste diversion efforts at the 2025 Future Farmers of America (FFA) event hosted at Cal Poly. With hundreds of attendees, volunteers played a key role in ensuring materials were correctly sorted, significantly reducing landfill-bound waste and promoting compost and recycling recovery at scale.

One of the main challenges the ZWA team faced was coordinating volunteers during busy times in the academic calendar. This made it difficult to maintain consistent staffing at events or to do more regular waste sorting volunteering at the dining halls. Adjusting the approach by increasing flexible shift options and promoting via College Corps class and announcement opportunities helped improve participation by the spring quarter. Additionally, the lack of correct, up to date signage made it difficult to communicate to students what materials go in which waste stream and why. Using the www.iwma.com website is a very useful tool when coming across novel plastic types. Activities like the whiteboard game helped attract attention and will be included in future events. Despite clear signage, confusion around sorting was still common—especially for compostable items—which highlights the need for ongoing and repetitive messaging about the compostable containers.

Waste Audits

In Spring 2025, two waste audits were conducted to assess contamination levels in Cal Poly's three-bin waste system: one at Vista Grande Dining Hall and one at the Red Bricks which houses first year students. Although compost, recycling, and landfill bins are provided across campus, both audits confirmed that high contamination rates often result in all waste being treated as landfill. The audits aimed to identify frequently mis-sorted items and evaluate how infrastructure and education interventions affect student sorting behavior.

The Vista Grande audit revealed that 83% of items (by weight) placed in the landfill bin could have been diverted, with 68% being compostable and 15% recyclable. The recycling stream was found to be 51% contaminated, while the compost stream had only 7% contamination—a significant improvement compared to previous years. Common compost contaminants include plastic utensils, receipts, and sauce containers. The relatively low compost contamination rate may be attributed to the introduction of new compost bins with lids and improved signage, which likely made students more intentional about their sorting decisions. These bins require users to lift the lid, adding a small pause that seems to reduce impulsive contamination.

At the Red Bricks, a key material consistently found in the landfill stream was paper towels. If clean, these items could be composted, suggesting an opportunity for greater education and signage around compostable paper products in residence halls. Findings from both audits highlighted the continued challenges in student waste sorting behavior and directly informed targeted outreach efforts, such as updated signage and the design of interactive education strategies.

Permanent Reuse Station

The Green Campus Team continued developing the concept for a Permanent Reuse Station that is envisioned to function as a thrift store where students, staff, and faculty can donate and retrieve clothes and other items at low or no cost. Beyond its primary function, the station would serve as a hub for reuse-focused initiatives and collaborations with programs such as the Cal Poly Professional Clothing Closet, the Grad Gown Reuse program, and CP Thrift.

In winter, the team—alongside members of sustainable entrepreneurship club Thrift Cal Poly—presented the proposal to the University Union Advisory Board (UUAB) with the goal of securing a space within the ASI operated “The Lounge” post Kennedy Library transformation. While the presentation was met with overall positive feedback, the board voted to maintain The Lounge as a dedicated study space for an additional year to support students during the reopening of Kennedy Library and stated they would welcome revisiting the proposal in 2025-26.

This year, the team also strengthened outreach and student support, gathering over 850 support signatures with the help of Thrift Cal Poly, and received a letter of support from the Professional Clothing Closet. The team revised, refined, and resubmitted last year’s Resolution, which was officially approved by the Board of Directors after having passed its initial risk assessment in an earlier separate review. While the passing of the resolution does not secure a space for the PRS, it formalizes ASI’s endorsement of the initiative and provides potential critical momentum for engaging additional campus stakeholders.

Water Bottle Recirculation

This program began Winter 2023 with a large donation of used, unclaimed water bottles from the Cal Poly Recreation Center. Our team cleaned the water bottles at the Vista Grande Dining Complex in collaboration with Campus Dining. Green campus then redistributed the water bottles to students for free at tabling events, and monthly clothing swaps.

This year we continued these efforts by reaching out to past water bottle donation sources. We received a large donation of around 40 bottles from ASI. These bottles were left behind in various ASI facilities and unclaimed for months before collection by ASI staff. Donations from the Cal Poly Food Pantry yielded around 20 unclaimed bottles, for a total of 60 bottles collected this year. Bottles were cleaned and distributed to students for free, specifically at Earth Week tabling events, an Inter Housing Counsel event, and Eco Reps club meetings.

We also aimed to expand the program this year. We reached out to potential new partners, where communication proved to be our main challenge. In particular, attempts to accommodate academic buildings would have required more correspondence and support from facilities custodial managers. In the future, ideally this program could be a service provided by the potential Permanent Reuse Station.



Grad Gown Reuse

The Grad Gown Reuse program collects donated graduation gowns, caps, tassels, and hoods for annual distribution to Cal Poly graduates for free on a lend-basis. This program aims to divert gowns from the landfill while also providing an affordable financial alternative. With over 50 new donations, just over 190 gowns were lent out to graduates at this 2025 commencement.

This process included a sign-up sheet exhibiting gowns by size and color that was made available to priority student groups, and later to the rest of the student body through social media. The team encouraged grad regalia donations at the Cal Poly Grad Fair, where it also collected over 400 gown tags, each contributing one dollar to the Cal Poly Eco Fund. This fund helps support campus sustainability efforts such as academic learning opportunities for students to sustainability research and engagement.

Additionally, the Cal Poly Scholars program bought and donated an additional 100 gowns to the program. The Green Campus team is grateful for the donation and excited to be able to offer the additional regalia for the upcoming commencement cycle. The Campus Reuse Team will continue efforts to gather gown donations annually with the goal of sustaining and growing the program for years to come.



VISIBILITY

Instagram followers gained:

350+

Instagram users reached over the last 90 days:

22,500

GREEN CAMPUS

2,354

ECO REPS

25+

Sustainability
Month and Earth
Week Events

4

Tours provided

40+

Clubs and
organizations
colaborated with

SUSTAINABILITY & EARTH WEEK ATTENDEES

700+

VISIBILITY

Monthly Campaigns / Social Media Outreach

Over the past year, Green Campus has successfully organized a series of monthly sustainability campaigns aimed at promoting practical and impactful actions. These campaigns included Green Cleaning, Green Cuisine, Sustainable Move-Out, Sustainable Gift Giving, Sustainable Camping, and Sustainable Halloween Tricks. Each campaign focused on raising awareness and encouraging sustainable behaviors through engaging social media posts, reels, newsletter blurbs, and resource sharing. For example, the Green Cleaning campaign promoted non-toxic alternatives with product highlights, while Green Cuisine encouraged more plant-based meals to reduce environmental impact. Sustainable Move-Out emphasized waste reduction through donations and recycling, and Sustainable Gift Giving provided eco-friendly gift ideas to minimize holiday waste. The Sustainable Camping campaign offered tips for responsible outdoor recreation to protect natural habitats. The Sustainable Halloween Tricks campaign showcased eco-friendly costume ideas and zero-waste treat options for a greener celebration. These campaigns consistently engaged the Cal Poly community, increasing social media interaction, resource downloads, and event participation. Together, these efforts have fostered a strong culture of sustainability and practical lifestyle changes across campus.

Sustainability Month

Sustainability Month is held every October on college campuses across the country, to raise awareness about how to be more sustainable. This year, Green Campus celebrated by organizing a variety of events including painting with repurposed food scraps, plant mounting, film screenings, and a festival with on and off campus entities. Many events were held in collaboration with other groups, such as the Surfrider club, the Ethnic Studies Department, SLO County Climate Justice Alliance, and SLO Climate Coalition. Engagement was tracked through head count at events, with 100+ attendees.

Earth Week

Held from April 14 to April 25, Earth Week 2025 featured a dynamic lineup of events designed to engage students around the themes of environmental, social, and economic sustainability. Green Campus partnered with various on campus and community organizations for the Earth Week Kickoff Festival, which was attended by over 600 Cal Poly community members. Organizations such as NOAA, Yerba Madre, and the Sierra Club joined us for this successful event to celebrate Earth Day.

Over the course of two weeks, students participated in a total of 14 events, including hands-on activities, panels, tours, and workshops. Highlights included the Food Waste Website Launch, the Green Careers Panel, and a well-attended Kickoff Festival that took place on Mustang Way.

Events such as the Campus Clean-Up, Movie Screening & Candle Jar Making, and the Make Waves Film Festival brought together students and local organizations to promote sustainability and community involvement. Events were advertised widely through department newsletters, faculty networks, as well as the Eco Reps and Green Campus Instagram accounts.



Eco Reps

Eco Reps is a Cal Poly club led by Cal Poly Green Campus dedicated to connecting with students about sustainability by providing a safe, exciting space to learn and interact with like-minded peers. Eco Reps offered interactive events such as on-campus tours and drives to promote sustainable initiatives.

This year, Eco Reps hosted tours of the Cal Poly Solar Farm and Plant Conservatory, as well as speakers from the Sierra Club and the Energy, Utility, and Sustainability Department, among other events. These meetings help pull back the curtain to interested students regarding what Cal Poly is doing to be a more sustainable campus and connecting students with volunteer opportunities like the Cheda Ranch Tree Planting and Earth Week Campus Cleanup.

4

Eco Reps
Speakers

